Italian fishermen injured by unexploded bombs dumped by NATO in the Adriatic Sea

A reporter
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Two Italian fishermen have been injured after unexploded NATO bombs, dumped into the Adriatic Sea, exploded in their fishing nets. At least 30 unexploded NATO bombs have now been caught up in fishing nets on the Venetian coast close to Aviano, which is NATO's main air base for the launching of attacks into Yugoslavia.

Fishermen in Venice have been on strike over the last week to try to force the Italian authorities to dispose of the bombs, which have made fishing in the area impossible. Italian authorities have asked NATO to explain why the unexploded cargo has ended up in Italian waters.

NATO's response has been dismissive and arrogant. A NATO spokesman was quoted as both acknowledging and defending the dumping of unexploded bombs on several occasions. He claimed that the bombs were dumped in "designated areas in international waters," and that it was common practice for planes which had mechanical problems to jettison unexploded bombs.

A meeting was held in Chioggia last Saturday between 200 fishermen and Italian government officials to discuss the situation. Chioggia is situated east of Venice and is the port where most of the area's fishing boats are based.

The Italian national fishing co-operative president, Enzo Fornaro, rejected NATO's claims that the bombs were disposed of in internationally designated areas. "It would be absurd because once explosives are dropped in the water they risk drifting to other parts of the sea." Massimo Coccia, president of a fishermen's association, also rejected NATO's response. "It's intolerable ... that an arm of the sea regularly crossed by fishermen has become a depot for war material."

The situation in Chioggia has intensified anti-NATO sentiment in Italy. Tens of thousands staged a silent march last Sunday from Perugia to Assisi in central Italy, protesting against the NATO bombing. Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini said earlier this week that the bombing had "certainly not produced the results that had been expected".

The economic effects on the fishing and tourist industry in Chioggia are part of the growing costs to the Italian economy for its part in NATO's war effort. It is estimated that in the first month of the campaign Italy had spent over 2,700 billion lira as a strategic country in the NATO alliance.

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